

Title: The Silent Stakeholders of the Digital Labor Market: Why Job Seekers Deserve a Voice

By Sarah Springsteen Trumble

Summary: Online hiring platforms have reshaped how we connect people to work, yet they have systematically excluded job seekers from meaningful participation in the design and governance of these systems. This exclusion is not merely an oversight—it has led to a labor market that is structurally optimized for friction and failure. With over 27 million Americans effectively functioning as unpaid revenue generators in a \$100B+ digital hiring industry, it is time to reimagine what a fair labor market should look like. This article argues that without job seeker reputation and accountability mechanisms, hiring platforms will continue to prioritize employer engagement over employment outcomes, eroding trust and fueling inefficiencies. By drawing from examples in ecommerce, housing, and transportation, we make the case for treating job seekers as stakeholders—not bystanders—in the labor economy.

Introduction: The Invisible Cost of Exclusion

In the shift from newspaper classifieds to digital job boards, most marketplaces integrated trust mechanisms to adapt. Buyers began rating sellers on eBay. Renters reviewed landlords on Zillow. Riders scored drivers on Uber. But in the online job market—a \$100+ billion segment—no reciprocal system exists. Job seekers remain voiceless.

That silence is not just a missing feature—it's a signal of structural failure. The absence of a reputation system for job postings has turned hiring into an engagement trap where ghost jobs, scams, and resume spam proliferate. The economic incentives of the platform are divorced from the needs of its most vulnerable users.

Job Seekers as Products, Not Participants

Without a mechanism for feedback, job seekers become products sold to employers, their attention monetized while their voices are ignored. Much like in surveillance capitalism, the user is the data. But here, the data is a person hoping to secure stable employment. Their frustration, churn, and endless engagement aren't a flaw in the system—they're the fuel.

Harvard Business School's 2021 report *Hidden Workers, Untapped Talent* identified 27.4 million Americans being overlooked in the hiring process. Yet it missed a critical layer: these job seekers aren't just "hidden"—they are being harvested. Platforms generate revenue as long as these users keep clicking, keep applying, and keep returning. Resolution? That's optional.

Learning from Other Markets

Ecommerce required trust to scale. Amazon thrives on user feedback. Airbnb would collapse without host ratings. Uber without driver reviews? Unthinkable. These platforms understood: reputation was the infrastructure that made remote commerce possible.

Yet job boards, despite scaling online, retained a newspaper-era logic—except newspapers had a financial incentive for accuracy. Platforms today profit even when the job doesn't exist. In fact, more friction often means more revenue. That's a market built on churn, not connection.

A Civil Society Problem with Economic Consequences

This isn't just about software. It's about social infrastructure. Public workforce systems and nonprofit job readiness programs increasingly rely on these very platforms. Millions of taxpayer dollars flow through them, yet no obligation exists to ensure accuracy, equity, or trust for job seekers.

In this way, we've normalized a labor market that thrives without delivering labor outcomes. And because job seekers can't speak back—can't rate postings, can't flag ghost jobs—they remain unprotected consumers in a market where everything is for sale except accountability.

Reimagining Accountability: Reputation as Infrastructure

Imagine a labor market where job seekers can leave feedback about the legitimacy, timeliness, and respectfulness of an employer's hiring process. Imagine a system where this feedback informs other applicants—and influences platform design. That's not a fantasy. It's a precedent set by every other functional online marketplace.

Giving job seekers voice isn't just about fairness. It's about efficiency. Feedback loops reduce spam, improve targeting, and build trust. And perhaps most critically, they shift the power dynamic. From unpaid revenue generators to informed participants.

Conclusion: Who Gets to Speak in the Labor Economy?

We have built a labor market where the people doing the most work—applying, interviewing, following up—are the least heard. That silence has a cost: in time, in wages, and in dignity. The Job Applicant Perspective exists to change that. Because no market works when half its users are invisible. And no democracy thrives when its workers are voiceless.

Reputation isn't a luxury—it is economic infrastructure. And restoring voice to job seekers isn't just innovation. It's overdue justice.

About the Author Sarah Springsteen Trumble is the founder and CEO of The Job Applicant Perspective, a platform bringing trust and transparency to hiring through crowdsourced job posting reviews. A systems thinker with a background in instructional design, public-sector strategy, and labor advocacy, Sarah's work centers on building human-first hiring ecosystems that work for everyone.